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File - Lansdale
- Cao Dai

29 March 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR AMBASSADOR COLLINS

Subject: Meeting with Generals Phuong & The, 29 March

1. The following are highlights of what General Phuong told me at a meeting at his house, 159 rue de Gaulle, this evening. General The was present, said little, but asked General Phuong to trust me.

2. The sect Front decided on a new Council at the meeting of its leaders today (comment: apparently at this afternoon's meeting) consisting of the following:

President: Pope Tac
Vice-President: General Soai
Commander-in-Chief, Sect Armed Forces: Bay Vien
Deputy Military Commanders: Lam Than Nguyen
Le Van Tat
Le Quang Vinh (Ba Cut)

3. General Tat is Phuong's deputy-commander of Cao Dai troops and is fervently religious, thus swayed by Pope Tac. At present, Pope Tac and General Tat command the loyalty of very few Cao Dai troops. General The confirmed this. Phuong feels that he can keep his troops loyal to the nation, and thus to the government, if he can make them truly a part of the national movement against the Vietminh and to build a strong, unified nation. But, he does not feel that he can keep them loyal if they are idle, even if he gets money to pay them, particularly if emotions grow strong in trouble involving the sects and Pope Tac works hard on them from a religious appeal for the greater good of Vietnam. Thus, he said he would like to integrate 12,000 of his men into government forces (he gave his strength as 16,000 of whom 4,000 are non-effectives at this time due to health, etc.). If the National Army cannot integrate all of these, and he stated he is willing that his men serve any place in the nation under General Staff orders, then perhaps some could be used by the government in the Civil Guard, police, social action, anywhere the government might make use of them. He added that he must be able to come up with some constructive answer for his men, if present political pressures continue, within two or three days. He and General The have refused to go along with Pope Tac, which is the reason the Pope selected General Tat to represent the Cao Dai military at today's meeting of the sect Front.

4. Today, Pope Tac sent a sect Front message to Bao Dai, requesting Bao Dai to take powers away from Ngo Dinh Diem and to give the sect Front the responsibility of forming a new government. (Phuong had a mimeographed message he said was written by the Hoa Hao, requesting Diem's resignation, and which he said was given to

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President Diem this noon by the Front).

5. Phuong said further that General Gambiez had asked him to meet with him on 30 March. (I remarked that it appeared to me that Gambiez had been playing ball with the government, and that Phuong should see Gambiez). Phuong remarked that General Gambiez had seen Bay Vien and General Soai recently (he thought it was on 28 March, but wasn't sure) at which time Gambiez told them that they had acted too quickly and should turn to political actions to achieve their goal rather than military.

6. I asked General Phuong what he thought the reaction of the Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen would be if only the Cao Dai were integrated into the National Army. He replied that they would both react, but could be handled. He mentioned that the Hoa Hao were not too highly motivated, that many people in their areas only supported the Hoa Hao through fear and would aid forces moving in to give them decent government in which they could participate.

7. I teased General The about not being able to keep his troops in "the forest" (mangrove swamps south of Saigon, about half way to Cap St Jacques). He reacted fast, stating that he had asked the National Army for drinking water (saying there was none in this area) and sufficient ammunition for supply to his men in case of combat; he said he had received neither. He added that his troops have received pay, but other than a little bit of clothing for the Saigon parade when integrated, they have received no supplies from the National Army. They are still standing by for orders, for use any place, but have received no orders, other than the one move towards the forest, for which they were given no supplies necessary for maintaining themselves there, their requests having been turned down by the 1st Military Region.

8. Our meeting broke up when General Phuong and General The left to see President Ngo Dinh Diem tonight.

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